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The Wisdom, Common Sense, and Reasoning of Jean Meslier

In 1728, the French curate Jean Meslier (1664-1729) completed a document entitled *Testament: Memoir of the Thoughts and Sentiments of Jean Meslier*. It consisted of ninety-seven chapters written with a goose quill pen by candlelight, taking ten years to complete. In this compendium he outlines the absurdities of Christianity and the Church by deconstructing the scriptures, the Bible, miracles, Jesus, the Trinity, the Eucharist, the Catholic Church and a supernatural God. He was among the first to call Christianity an imposture or a fraud. He insisted, quite understandably, that this volume not be published until after his death. (They were still occasionally burning people at the stake for heresy). An abridged version was soon published by Voltaire, but Voltaire, being a Deist, did not completely capture the non-theistic thinking of Meslier. In 1772, an abstract by Baron d'Holbach (1723-1789)



Jean Meslier

entitled *Superstition in all Ages, (Common Sense)* was published. This abstract, along with Voltaire's abstract, was translated into English by Miss Anna Knoop in 1878. A complete printing of the original *Testament* in French was apparently not published until 1846. The complete *Testament* was not published in English until 2009 by Paris translator Michael Shreve, and it is this 595 page volume that will be used as a reference throughout the rest of this *Enlightenment*.

For forty years, Jean Meslier was a curate at the small village of Étréigny in Champagne France and vicar of a little annexed parish named Bue. He did not particularly want to be a priest, but became one to please his parents. He was remarkable for the austerity of his habits. Devoted to his duties, every year he gave what remained of his salary to the poor of his parishes. Enthusiastic and rigid of virtue, he was very temperate, as much in regard to his appetite as in his relation to women. At his death his parishioners were surprised to find in his house three manuscripts, each containing three hundred and sixty-six pages, all written by his hand, signed and entitled *My Testament*. Meslier, who wholly abjured religious dogmas, left these writings as a last will and testament to his parishioners and to the world. It is regrettable that a complete volume in English was not published until very recently, because this work is truly a bombshell. While the original French text is occasionally disjointed and somewhat repetitious (Voltaire called it convoluted), the English version has been edited a bit to make it more readable without detracting from the message. It is, I believe, very fortunate that the ultra-intelligent Meslier was trained as a priest, because this enabled him to observe the spuriousness of Christianity and the Catholic Church first hand, and then leave his revolutionary conclusions to posterity.

President's Remarks

As I write this, it is officially the beginning of autumn, and the weather has taken a definite turn toward cold, wet, and dreary. Looking back over the summer, it's hard to know how it went by so quickly. I hope you all had an agreeable and relaxing summer, taking pleasure in the warmth and sunshine while it lasted. I enjoyed seeing many of you at our HALA Summer Solstice picnic at the Chefurka farm, where we had a good time of food and fellowship. I'm convinced that these sorts of social events are very important for us as Humanists, allowing us to develop a stronger sense of community and mutual caring. Once again, I want to thank Bill and Pat Chefurka for kindly hosting the event on their lovely rural property. Despite the change in the weather, I am feeling quite cheery and optimistic about the future prospects for HALA and for Humanism in general. Our programming committee is working hard on planning interesting and stimulating speakers and topics for our meetings over the coming months. Our speaker series at the Wolf Performance Hall earlier in the summer has given us increased visibility in the community and has already attracted several new visitors. Several recently published books have highlighted the value of Humanism as a satisfying secular alternative to religious faith, further increasing public awareness. The forecast for Humanism is indeed sunny and bright! In closing, I want to thank Don Hatch for all the work he has put into preparing another very interesting and informative issue of the Enlightenment.

~ Rod Martin

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Michael Shreve's Translation of the Testament of Jean Meslier

Reviewed By Donald Hatch

Michael Shreve's translation of Jean Meslier's *Testament* begins with a Preface by the well-known French philosopher and atheist, Michel Onfray. In this Preface, Onfray calls the *Testament* a time bomb and offers a concise summary of its content. This is followed by Meslier's own Preface outlining his "Plan of the Work" explaining why he felt compelled to put his thoughts in writing. He explains his reason for writing the *Testament* by quoting Ecclesiastes 3:16: *I saw under the sun that in the place of justice, wickedness was there, and in place of righteousness, wickedness was there as well.*

In the second chapter Meslier expresses his thoughts on the "Religions of the World," calling them "false" and a "fraud" and "full of mysterious delusions, errors and impostures." He calls the priests "pious morons." And he mentions the famous quote, often attributed to Denis Diderot, but really first said by Meslier: "All the rulers of the earth and all the nobles should be hanged with the guts of priests." He also mentions the quote of several popes (Julius III, Leo X and Boniface VIII) who stated: "Ah! How rich we are from this fable of Christ." He goes on to say, "after my death let them call me an impious apostate, a blasphemer and an atheist, but I have seen the errors and impostures of religion, and the pride and injustice of the rulers that govern so imperiously and tyrannically over the earth."

In the short third chapter, Meslier explains that religions and heaven and hell are all human inventions, used by priests and rulers, "to keep a tight rein on the community of men and do with them whatever they wanted."

The remaining ninety-four chapters consist of eight proofs, each dealing with different aspects of religion. But before examining the proofs, however, a few comments about Meslier's library should prove helpful. It is thought that Meslier had no more than fifty books in his library, but what a library! From reading the *Testament* it is evident he was familiar with the myths of Egypt, Greece and Rome, the teachings of Confucius and Buddha, the works of the major Greek and Roman philosophers and Classical writers, and the works of the French Renaissance writers, particularly Michel Montaigne who is perhaps best known for his quote, "Men cannot make a mite, yet they make gods by the dozens." Montaigne was Meslier's greatly admired hero, and with the exception of the Bible, quotes him more than any other source. His knowledge of the Bible was of course prodigious, and he acknowledges that as well as containing many fallacies, the Bible also contains much wisdom. Being a priest, he had an understanding of Latin, but we do not know if he could read Greek. It is obvious that if he had known as much about science as we know today, some of the proof sections of the *Testament* would have been much shorter, and his explanations of natural phenomena would be less convoluted and somewhat clearer. He does not appear to have read Newton, and thus has no concept of the laws of gravity and motion. Now on to the proofs.

Each proof begins with the heading, "On the Vanity and Falsity of Religions." In the proofs he makes a strong case that all religions and all gods are human inventions. He expounds on the falsities of faith, miracles, visions and divine revelations, and also on the errors of doctrines and morality. He attacks the tyrannical leaders of his day, advocates a form of communism, and formulates a case that there is no life after death. What follows is an attempt to capture the meanings of each of the eight proofs in summary form.

First Proof: All religions are human inventions. (Five chapters). The explanation is simple. Since there are so many different religions in the world, all claiming to be the one and only “real and perfect” religion, it is impossible for an independent observer to reason that any one of them is perfect and created by a divine deity. Therefore, they are all inventions, with no exceptions.

Second Proof: On the falsity of faith, and miracles. (Twelve chapters). “Faith.” Meslier says, “is a blind belief that serves as the foundation of all religions, and is only a principle of errors, illusions and impostures. It is a firm and confident belief in certain questionable laws and divine revelations. It is necessary for religions to allege this because it is this belief that gives them all the credibility and authority they have in the world, without which they would not be able to count on teaching or ordering people to do or practise their bidding. Faith is claimed to be the beginning and foundation of salvation, and is touted as the root of all justice and holiness, but in reality it is nothing more than an illusion.” On miracles, Meslier comments that if Jesus had performed all the miracles attributed to him, he would have attracted the glory and admiration of all people, not just the ignorant dregs of society, poor labourers and fishermen. These so called miraculous events would surely have been recorded by historians of the day if they had in fact occurred.

Third Proof: On the vanity and falsity of visions and divine revelations. (Five chapters). In this section Meslier points out the absurdity of men receiving visions containing instructions from God. Why would a benevolent God give a barbaric commandment to Abraham to sacrifice Isaac, his son? Why, when God promised to make his chosen people the greatest nation on earth, has this not happened? Why would God demand the barbaric sacrifice of innocent beasts? Why would God want to establish an alliance with his people by demanding the cruel and ridiculous practice of cutting off the flesh and skin of the most private part of the male anatomy? Why would a compassionate, caring, and all-powerful God offer his divine son as a sacrifice in memory of him, by being shamefully and miserably hanged on a cross? Meslier describes these and other similar things as madness

Fourth Proof: On the falsities of the prophecies of the Bible. (Three chapters). Meslier describes the prophets of the Old Testament as lunatics, fanatics, imposters and scoffers. They prophesized falsely in the name of God to deceive and seduce the simple and ignorant people. He justifies this harsh evaluation by noting that the things these men prophesized in the name of their God did not happen as they predicted, and on the contrary, everything turned to their disadvantage and confusion. On New Testament prophecies, Meslier is even harsher. It was said that Jesus Christ, so-called redeemer or savior, would deliver his people from their sins. But since this prophecy has not been accomplished, it is false. It was said that this deliverance would avoid eternal punishment, but it did not prevent vice from occurring on earth. It did not deliver believers from the yoke of tyrannical leaders of the earth, and certainly not from the vain and crazy superstitions of religion. And the prophecy that Jesus would occupy the throne of David is clearly false, for it is certain that he was never on this throne and never reigned over the Jewish people. Meslier goes on to cite, in total, seventeen so-called promises that Jesus Christ did not accomplish. Then he switched to commenting on Christian doctrines that he claims are vain, laughable and childish. One of these is the Eucharist, where he describes the host as an “idol of dough.” Near the end of the last chapter in this fourth proof he states: “Yet it is on such vain and ridiculous foundations that the entire Christian religion rests and it is on these vain and ridiculous spiritual and allegorical interpretations, that our Christ-cultists founded their so-called Holy Scriptures, and based all their mysteries, their doctrine and all their beautiful hopes on an eternally blissful life in a fictitious heaven.”

Fifth Proof: On the errors of doctrine and morality. (Twelve chapters). The first doctrinal error considered is the enigmatic Trinity. Using his logical analytical mind, Meslier states, “The Trinity is clearly absurd: if there are three who are really God, there are really three Gods. And if there are really three Gods, it is false to say that there is only one God. Or if it is true to say that there is really only one God, it is false to say that there are really three who are God, since ‘one’ and ‘three’ cannot really be said to be one and the same thing.” Case closed.

The second error concerns the incarnation of God becoming man. He dismisses the incarnation right away by stating that Jesus was only a man, and a mortal man like other men. He then calls Jesus a nobody with no talent, no mind, no learning, no skill, low born, a wretched fanatic, a madman, a fool, a fiend, a seducer, and a miserable scoundrel who was nailed and hanged on a cross. He was a lunatic who imagined he was the son of God, born to deliver the Jews from captivity, become king of the Jews and after death would return to rule over God’s kingdom eternally on earth, where justice would reside. Meslier says the visions and wild thoughts of the famous fanatic Don Quixote, were never as crazy as those of Jesus, and he notes that after Jesus’ first speech in a synagogue in Nazareth, the admiration of the Jews turned to indignation and they wanted to throw him off a cliff. (Luke 4:28,29). He calls Jesus mentally deranged because he so vainly imagined and predicted so many great and beautiful things that never happened. Regarding the teaching of Jesus he says, “I feel safe in saying that even the fables of Aesop are certainly more ingenious and instructive than all those crude and low parables that are told in the Gospels.” Meslier ends this section by noting that, in the beginning, Christianity was considered to be nothing but a madness and a vile and despicable fanaticism. He also mentions that in the early days of Christianity there was a saying in Italy that, “you have to be crazy to be a Christian.”

The third doctrinal error deals with the Eucharist, which Meslier describes as the Holy Sacrament of “dough and flour.” He dwells on the absurdity of transubstantiation, the belief that the body and blood of Jesus are present in the wafer and the wine when Christians repeat the words, “This is my body” and “This is my blood.” He comes close to calling this cannibalism.

The fourth error is the doctrine of original sin. Meslier calls the Garden of Eden story a fable and notes how ridiculous it is to believe that humans are cursed forever because Eve ate the forbidden fruit.

The fifth error is about God’s punishment for sins. Again another absurdity! Why does God allow good people to experience misfortunes when evil people often thrive? And the concept of punishment in the flames of hell for disobeying God’s laws is also ridiculous.

The remainder of the fifth proof is about Christian morality. Jesus cursed the rich and those who enjoyed themselves and were happy in this world, and instead extolled those who were poor and hungry. Meslier said this was nonsense. There is no virtue in being poor and hungry, and humans have a right to be able to work toward the better things in life and achieve some level of happiness.

He then surprisingly tackles the subject of pre-marital sex. It is almost certain that Meslier was not a celibate priest. Church rules dictated that the housekeepers of priests had to be at least forty years old. On two different occasions Meslier had young girls as “housekeepers” and he got around the regulations by claiming they were his nieces. He says it is an error of Christian morality to condemn the natural pleasures of the body and asks what benevolent God would

want to make young people burn in hell for only having a few moments of pleasure together? On the other hand, he did not condone promiscuity or debauchery. Moderation must be practised.

Another error in Christian morality is the teaching that we must love our enemies. Just as it is natural to hate evil, it is also natural to hate those who unjustly do evil. For the public good, evildoers should be punished, not forgiven.

Sixth Proof: On the falsity of the Christian Religion in regard to its toleration of the abuses of tyrannical rulers. (Eighteen chapters). Meslier bases his argument in this proof on the fact that a religion that tolerates, approves, and authorizes abuses instead of good government, cannot be true, nor can it be a divine institution. In this section he lists a number of abuses that existed in eighteenth century France. The first is inequality, which he says is unjust and detestable. It is not right that certain people, because of their birth or good fortune, should have the right to live in luxury, while the majority live in poverty. This applies not only to the kings and nobles, but also to those in the Church. While bishops and priests may have some usefulness in that they impart morals and ethics to the masses, others, such as monks and nuns, live the good life while contributing little or nothing to the common good of society. He touches on the subject of greed, calling it insatiable, and the root of all, or at least most, vices and evils. He also deals with the subject of Theodicy. Why does an all knowing, all powerful and benevolent God allow so much suffering in the world or allow horrific natural disasters to occur? If God possessed all these good attributes, he could easily prevent suffering and disasters. This lack of God's action causes one to conclude that he does not really exist. Meslier, perhaps surprisingly, even raises the subject of divorce, which the Church forbids. He notes that, if divorce were allowed, it would bring an end to countless bad and unhappy marriages, and this would be good for both parties. He ends the sixth proof by being very critical of the French monarchy because the system is largely responsible for the inequality existing in France and elsewhere. He urges that the citizens should unite and overthrow the monarchy. The *Testament* was written during the reign of Louis XV (1715-1774). Meslier's desire for revolution came to fruition in 1789, when the French Revolution occurred sixty years after his death. Louis XVI was king at the time of the Revolution and both he and his queen, Marie Antoinette, lost their heads on the guillotine. In place of the monarchy, Meslier advocated a system of equality, where property would be shared in common. In this regard, he was a forerunner of Karl Marx and Friedrich Engels. In recognition of his early advocacy for a form of communism, his name is inscribed, along with other communist pioneers, on an obelisk in Moscow.

Seventh Proof: Concerning the so-called existence of God. (Twenty-eight chapters). This proof is the longest in the *Testament* taking up close to two hundred pages - about one third of the book. Meslier begins by mentioning the absurd divine right of kings. These rulers claim to base their power and their authority on the concurrence of an all-powerful God, by the grace of whom they are supposedly privileged to govern and command other men. These rulers abusively use the name of God to justify their tyrannical actions and to maintain the status of their religions, but since there is no God, they are operating under false pretences. Meslier states categorically that he will present conclusive arguments taken from the principles of metaphysics, physics and morality, to prove the vanity and falsity of all the world's religions and also prove that God does not exist. He mentions, citing Spinoza and others, that he is not the first to question belief in a supernatural God. He uses Richard Dawkins' argument that since Christians do not believe the multitude of pagan gods were real, and also believe without question that the pagan gods were human inventions, it is only one further logical step to believe that the monotheistic God of the Jews was also a human invention. Meslier even claims that Moses himself invented God as a deceitful ploy to give himself authority over the Israelites.

Not knowing anything about Darwinian evolution, nor that the universe is a little over fourteen billion years old, Meslier sets out to prove the non-existence of God, using the limited science of his day. He adamantly refutes the Genesis creation story and, not being aware of the big bang theory, he postulates that, because it is impossible to create something out of nothing, the physical universe has always existed in its present state, and will continue to exist forever in that condition; therefore, it was not created by God. When it comes to living matter that is born and dies, he suggests that life was created by Nature herself and that living things were arranged and manifest in the wonders we observe all around us by this same Natural phenomenon. In a way he was foretelling Darwin's theory of evolution by natural selection. He called it a system of natural formation. Because he apparently was not aware of Newton's laws of gravity and motion, he was puzzled as to how non-animated objects could move, but reasoned this movement must be caused by some natural law of motion, not by a non-existent God.

In this seventh proof Meslier goes on and on, trying to substantiate his arguments for the non-existence of God. Finally he says, "So we have to acknowledge that matter has its being and movement from itself, and it is entirely useless to have recourse to the existence of an all powerful God who does not exist and could not do anything if it did exist, seeing that if it did exist, it could not even move itself since it would be entirely unmoving and unchanging by nature. And for the same reason it is totally useless for our god-cultists to worship and pray to it and offer sacrifices to it as they do on the pretext of obtaining whatever graces and favors they get from it. For we see clearly every day that God has no more consideration for the good people who pray, than for the evil people who do not. So why do the god-cultists not just freely admit that he really does not exist?" (This is a good example of Meslier's drawn-out reasoning).

Next, Meslier moves on to the important topic of life after death. He believes we will all return to the state we were in before we were born. After death we will think about nothing, feel nothing and imagine nothing. So it is really in vain that the god-cultists and Christ-cultists boast of a great beatitude after death, since they will not even have a mind to think about beatitude or anything else. He turns to a wisdom passage in the Bible to substantiate this contention.

The living know at least that they will die, but the dead know nothing and they wait for no reward; no feelings of hatred or love or any desire at all affect them and they take part no longer in all that is done in the world. Go, then, in peace and joy to enjoy the goods that you have! Drink and eat the fruits of your labor in peace and rejoice with your friends and loved ones; for that is all the good you can hope for in life. (Ecclesiastes 9:5-9)

So according to the doctrines of the Holy Book, it is vanity and a deceitful presumption to wait for another life; consequently, there is no reward except in our present life.

Continuing his argument that there is no God, Meslier turns to an obvious observation. If there was a perfect, all-powerful, caring God, he should be able to take all kinds of benevolent actions to improve the conditions of humans on earth. For example, he would not allow humans to be born with birth defects, and he should be able to prevent evil and miseries, and also prevent people from being killed by natural disasters. Since there is no evidence of any of these benevolent actions, there must not be a God. Meslier then notes that when the god-cultists are asked why their God allows bad things to happen, they always come up with excuses. Here is a typical one: God allows evils in order to manifest some greater good and, consequently, we should not be surprised if he allows evils because he can turn them into greater glory and to greater good for all his creatures. This excuse, like all the others, makes no sense.

As mentioned above, Meslier's proof for the non-existence of God is a long, drawn-out exercise, but I hope I have been able to capture the gist of his arguments.

Eighth Proof: On the spirituality and immortality of souls. (Eleven chapters). In this proof, Meslier sets out to prove that body and soul are one, and that humans do not have a spiritual soul that survives death. He says, "we do have a soul, but it is something real and substantial and consequently it must necessarily be corporeal and material and have extension, since nothing can be real or exist without body and extension." Throughout this section, Meslier unmercifully criticizes the Cartesian idea of body and soul being separate things, one physical and one spiritual. He is particularly critical of the Cartesian belief that although humans have souls, animals do not. He quite logically explains that, like us, animals are composed of flesh, blood and bone and possess similar organs of life and sensation, including a brain. They are capable of feelings and emotions and even have some form of language that enables them to communicate amongst themselves. It is not souls that separate humans from the animals, because neither they nor we possess an ethereal spiritual entity that survives death. What separates us from the higher animals is our larger brain and comprehensive language. Meslier goes on at some length to deplore the cruel ways in which animals are sometimes treated. He could not stand to be near a slaughterhouse, and although he apparently was not a true vegetarian, his consumption of meat was kept to a minimum.

In chapter ninety-three Meslier very neatly sums up his conclusions regarding souls: "And although it is difficult to know its nature and operations very distinctly, we nevertheless very carefully feel, internally and externally, that we are only matter and our most spiritual thoughts are only in the matter of our brain and are made with dependence on the natural condition of our brain. Consequently, what we call 'our soul' can be nothing else but a portion of the finest, subtlest, and most restless matter of our body, which is mixed up and modified in a certain way with another, cruder matter with which it composes an organic body and by its constant restlessness gives it life, movement, and sentiment." Then he goes on, "If the soul is material and mortal like the body, then there is no reward to hope for, nor is there punishment to fear after this life." In a way, he says, this is regrettable, "because those who committed vicious and abominable deeds will not be punished, nor will innocent people be rewarded for their virtues and good deeds. And since the world is, as we see, necessarily a confused mix of good and evil, it evidently follows that it was not made by an infinitely perfect being and consequently, there is no God. This argument is again conclusive and as clear as the midday sun."

In the concluding chapters, Meslier offers his summations and final thoughts. Here are a few of them: "And so it is clearly demonstrated, by all the arguments I have put forth, that all the religions of the world are only human inventions, and that everything they teach us or make us believe are only errors, illusions, lies and impostures invented by scoffers, swindlers, and hypocrites to deceive men. This applies not only to religious leaders, but also to the shrewd and crafty politicians who hold men in check and do whatever they want to ignorant people because it is necessary that the common man not know very many truths, but cause him to believe in many falsehoods." He continues, "I would like to be able to make my voice heard from one end of the kingdom to the other, or rather from one extremity of the earth to the other. I would cry out with all my force: O men, you are crazy! You are crazy to let yourselves be led in this way and to believe so blindly in so many stupidities. I would make those who govern aware that they are in error making men so miserable and unhappy everywhere, and that in centuries to come, they will be recognized in shame and disgrace." He then urges men to, "entirely reject all these vain and superstitious practices of religions! Banish from your minds this crazy and blind belief in false mysteries, put no faith in it, mock everything your self-interested priests tell you! Most of

them do not believe a word of it. Would you want to believe more than they themselves believe?”

Meslier then puts on his communist hat and exhorts, “work to unite all of you, as many as you are, you and your fellow men, to completely shake off the yoke of the tyrannical domination of your kings and princes. Overthrow the thrones of injustice and impiety everywhere. Break all the crowned heads! Confound everywhere the pride and haughtiness of all the proud and haughty tyrants. No longer allow them to rule over you in any way! Unite then, people, if you are wise! All of you unite, if you have a heart to deliver yourself from all your common miseries! Wake up and encourage each other to such a noble, generous, important and glorious undertaking such as this!”

Near the end Meslier offers his profound thoughts on what a religion should be: “Hold no other religion among you but that of true wisdom and honest ways, no other but that of honour and propriety, of frankness and generosity of heart, no other but to completely abolish the tyranny and superstitious cult of the gods and their idols, no other but to maintain justice and equality everywhere, to completely banish the errors and impostures and to make truth, justice, and peace reign everywhere, no other but for all to be busy in some honest and useful exercise and to live orderly in common, to maintain public liberty at all times, and finally to love each other and keep peace and good union among you inviolably. You will be happy if you follow the rules, maxims, and precepts of this only wise and true religion. But I dare say, although I am no prophet, that you and your descendants will always be miserable and unhappy as long as you follow any religion other than this.”

Note that Meslier uses the word “religion” in the above description. Most humanists would probably prefer the term “life stance: instead, but in any case, what he has outlined is truly a concise and common sense set of guidelines to live by in a secular environment.

Finally, I want to conclude with a succinct message that Meslier is reputed to have left for his parishioners: “I never believed any of that religious nonsense. There’s no God, there’s no afterlife, and the church helps tyrants like your king to keep you poor and exploited. You’re on your own, but stand up to the bastards and you might just create a fairer world.”

Concluding Comments

It is regrettable that the entire *Testament* was not translated into English until 2009, because Meslier’s message is so all-encompassing and so logically thought out. Rather than limit his message to the non-existence of God, he exposes the deceptiveness of all religions, and it is this complete package that I believe humanists should utilize in their efforts to educate the public about the need to leave religions behind, and work towards a peaceful and prosperous secular world. In this regard, perhaps we should take note of the way he depicts Jesus, calling him a nobody with no talent plus all the other derogatory terms stated above in the Fifth Proof. Because Jesus is the centerpiece of Christianity, if Meslier’s assessment of him is accurate, then Christianity truly is an invented imposture, and the Western world has been duped for two thousand years. Maybe it is time to put as much effort into explaining the falsity of Jesus and the deceptions of Christianity, as has been exerted in promoting the non-existence of God!

In any event, we are now fortunate that the complete *Testament* expounding Meslier’s wisdom, common sense and reasoning, is now available to the English-speaking world.

Dying With Dignity Meeting

As a follow-up to the article, "On the Good(?) Death" in the last issue of *The Enlightenment*, the Memorial Society of London, in conjunction with the Unitarian Fellowship of London, is sponsoring a public meeting featuring Meg Westley, president of Dying With Dignity, on Saturday, 15 October, 2011, at 2:00 P.M. at Beal Secondary School. Use the King Street entrance. There is FREE parking at the William Street entrance, south of King Street. Should you just wish information on the subject or should you or a loved one have a terminal illness or be facing the prospect of a long decline, this is an opportunity to obtain current information on the health-care and end-of-life options available.

A related issue has currently surfaced in British Columbia that surely will wend its way to the Supreme Court of Canada. As you may recall, Sue Rodrigues of B.C., 42 years old and suffering from the debilitating terminal illness, amyotrophic lateral sclerosis, ALS or Lou Gehrig's disease, launched a legal action that led to a Supreme Court of Canada ruling. On 30 September, 1993, her appeal was dismissed in a 5-4 decision, upholding the legislation of the day (and still current) that to assist a person to commit suicide is a criminal offense. Subsequently, with the assistance of an anonymous physician and with Svend Robinson in attendance, she did take her own life.

Currently in B.C., there are three related court actions before the British Columbia Supreme Court. In one case that parallels that of Sue Rodrigues, Gloria Taylor, suffering from ALS and with less than a year to live, supported by the British Columbia Civil Liberties Association, has appealed to the British Columbia Supreme Court for the right to assisted suicide. She has been granted an expedited hearing for November, 2011.

Additionally, the Farewell Foundation is appealing a decision that prohibits its registration as a non-profit society in B.C. because of its illegal purpose to promote the cause of assisted suicide, currently punishable by a prison term of up to 14 years. As well, the Foundation has filed a suit challenging the constitutionality of the law against assisted suicide.

Since the 1993 decision, views on euthanasia (from the Greek, literally 'the good death') or assisted suicide have evolved. In the United States, the states of Oregon, Washington, and Montana have physician aid-in-dying legislation. Internationally, the Netherlands, Belgium and Luxembourg have enabling legislation. Switzerland even has a clinic to which people may go for this purpose. In Canada, a February 2010 Angus Reid poll indicated about a 2/3 nation-wide support for the legalization of euthanasia with the highest support in Quebec (77%) and British Columbia (75%).

Should you have questions or concerns about life-end care/options, there will be opportunity for discussion during the question/answer session. Come and bring a friend (or three).

Contact - for further information or to schedule an interview, please contact Meg Westley in Stratford at (519) 273-4959.

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